

# LUCILLE LOVE, The Girl of Mystery

By the "MASTER PEN"

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A Crumb of Bread Makes a Loaf of Hope.

LUCILLE awoke to a numbing sense of failure, defeat, of loss irreparable. For a few moments she allowed her head to rest against the pillows, perfectly passive, retracing the course of her efforts in the fight with Loubeque for recovery of the papers up to this disastrous conclusion.

Theft, dishonor, treachery had pointed lean fingers at her sweet heart with accuracy such as only a loving woman could deny. And, despite it all, she had feared at the possibility of such a thing being true. Had she lived, honor everything and anything unobtainable whenever it appeared a point might be scored against Loubeque by so doing. And for some time was seated at her window scattering crumbs on the ledge for stray birds. As she crossed the room a moment later a metallic sound struck against her ears again and again before she was even conscious of it. She looked about the room then made out the sound coming from the window ledge. Curiously she regarded the pigeon, strutting about there, eagerly devouring the crumbs. Upon his leg she saw a tiny, brass cylinder, tapping away with a warning, thumping violently even as she recognized the pretty creature for a carrier bird. Stepping quickly to the window of her bedroom she stared about her, a smile crossing her face as, by careful count, she made out the crumbs upon the eighth window ledge from hers. That would be Hugo Loubeque's apartment.

Swiftly, softly, tremulously, for fear the bird might have fled, Lucille reached the ledge, her voice low and husky as she reached, an infinitesimal fraction of an inch at a time toward the carrier. Once he lifted his wings, poised a second, Lucille halted in her approach, then, as the bird's doubts were allayed, reached out and clasped him firmly, surprised that he made no effort to escape. In a second she had detached the cylinder, taking the tiny brass paper note from it.

"Arrangements complete. Deliver papers to Ensign Howell, U. S. Ship Terror, with affidavit to Washington, D. C. at your residence; 5:30."

Lucille gasped as she took in the meaning of the message. For just a moment she sat staring dully ahead of her, dismay and terror frozen in her eyes. At 5:30 the international spy's work would be completed and her father ruined. But would be completed and the stolen papers with the life of Loubeque accepted, and innocently, doubtless promised, would be in the hands of the prosecution.

She clenched her fists tightly together, pacing up and down the floor of her suite, her pretty teeth fastened upon her under lip, her very being vibrant with protest at the horrible injustice of it all. It must not be. It could not be. She stopped suddenly. It should not be. Calmly she crossed to the writing desk and added a line through the hour appointed, carefully making an eight of the five. She scanned the result of her labors with knitted brows.

She loosed the pigeon, pointing him toward a window which was open. She knew Loubeque was growing impatient from that sign. Furtively she watched the eager hands clutch the bird and draw him from view. The window slapped shut once more.

Loubeque was there, just a few suites away from her, was even now gloating with satisfaction over the fruition of his life's work. The thought made her beat her fists together against the enforced waiting. She had never felt so utterly impotent before. There seemed nothing possible to do but sit and wait—wait—

But wait she could not and would not do. So few hours remain wherein to regain the precious packet of papers that she must be at work. The papers were not a few short suites away, on the very same floor.

His residence she knew must mean the house of mystery, the weird place of horrors, of sliding staircases and folding rooms. That Loubeque should choose such a rendezvous showed how plainly he considered the last trick in the game of his life played, how absolutely assured he now was of absolute and final success. At five thirty, Ensign Howell would be at his house. She had three hours wherein to work. But the hours between—what of them? She could not endure inaction at this moment.

With the thought she rose and moved toward the door, closing it softly behind her. For a moment she hesitated in the hall, then stepped boldly to the suite of the spy, rapping upon the door.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

The Butler-Thief Makes His Last Bid.

HUGO LOUBEQUE, master of men and nations, whose power was so great the course of Empires halted at his spoken word of command, moodily stared out his window after the carrier pigeon he had just released. For forty years he had bent every energy of his life for this day; every hour of those forty years had contained a dream of his revenge so dear to his heart it had caused him to redoubt his energies. And now that it had come, somehow the sweet had turned bitter upon his palate.

He stirred a bit uneasily in his chair. He had almost been lulled to sleep by the spell of the past that had woven itself for him. His mission was not yet complete.

Strangely enough, a tender smile played about the corners of his hard mouth as he thought of the girl upon the same floor with him, the girl who was the image of the Lucille of forty years ago, the Lucille who, at the climax of his scheming, at his supreme moment when he had possession of the papers stolen from General Love's safe, had flown out to the speeding Pacific liner and thenceforth through jungle, shipwreck, fire, war, starvation had continually thwarted him, hounded him when he held the upper hand and defeated him time and again. No, not till the actual transfer of the stolen papers and his affidavit into the hands of the Ensign would he actually know that Lucille had finally been beaten.

Lucille—He murmured the name over tenderly, even as his fingers plucked the precious picture of the girl's mother from his breast pocket. He had treasured that picture above all other possessions these forty years, yet now he found himself regarding it merely as the likeness of the daughter. Lucille the daughter of that other Lucille of the long ago—

He rose impatiently, ashamed of the mellow mood that was upon him and moved across the floor. The slightest swaying of the curtains that connected with the bed-room caught his eye. He did not pause, did not even hesitate but a hard look crept into his eyes. He resumed his seat after a moment, took his gloves from the table and busied himself strangely with them. A tapping on the door made him frown impatiently, then answer it, smiling to find Lucille, dressed for the street, confronting him.

"Since the mountain won't come to Mohamet, Mohamet must go to the mountain," she quoted

with a light laugh, a laugh that belied the worn expression about her lips.

"The mountain certainly knew of no desire," laughed the spy, frank pleasure on his countenance. "Is it a walk you planned—tea?"

"An invitation to luncheon," she returned, "and I wonder if it would be too much to ask of you to see that they give me a good machine for the afternoon?"

"I'll phone," he responded, hardening instantly at the shadow of displeasure that crossed her face. Evidently she wished to be rid of him. He smiled to think of how close the game was to being finished. Somehow, he could not get any acute pleasure out of it now he looked at this smiling girl and realized that precious few would be the smiles upon that face after he had finished. But, pshaw! Why would his mind persist in thinking of such things. He bowed and repeated the hour of their engagement as she tripped down the hall, then resumed his seat at the table.

From a drawer there he took a small, thin mirror which he slipped swiftly into the top of his glove, then placed the glove upon his hand. A grim expression was on his face as he leaned back in his chair once more, his eyes fastened upon the entrance to the bedroom as revealed to him in the mirror even though his back was turned from that entrance.

Hour dragged upon the heel of hour, chased each other out the room as though frightened of the silent, motionless figure at the table. Hugo Loubeque took no account of time save to make the most of it when action was necessary and to throttle it when delay seemed best suited to his purpose. Slowly the grey head of the man swayed from side to side. He caught himself abruptly. Again his head sank toward his chest, this time to remain there. Apparently Loubeque slept as he did everything else soundly, yet with the least possible amount of effort.

The portieres swayed more and more heavily. Grew the outlines of a human face against the smooth velvet. Through the opening crept a pair of furtive eyes. Slowly, slowly, the face of Thompson showed. He did not bother to look at the slumberer. Before revealed himself he had made sure that his old master slept soundly. Swift, certain, sure, he moved beyond the curtains. The thief who had been selected by the arch-spy to attend to his most important plan made no sound. So soft his footfall it seemed he might have walked across the strings of a musical instrument without a sigh rippling from them.

Closer, closer, a step at a time he advanced. The hate had left his eyes, for there was no time for hate when bent on business. Almost close enough to reach out and reach a hand upon Loubeque's shoulder he was, when he halted, his mouth dropping ludicrously open, his feet apparently glued to the carpet, his fingers twitching uncertainly, his eyes fastened in amazement on his own face as it stared back at him from the tiny mirror in the glove hand of Hugo Loubeque.

As he recovered, his hand darting swiftly toward his pocket, the sinister laughter of his master broke the silence.

"Keep the hand in the pocket, Thompson. Keep it there or I shall be obliged to shoot and miss the place."

The butler-thief's upper lip curled back from his teeth, giving him the expression of an angry mongrel dog. All the servile politeness had disappeared from his manner and his soul lay bare upon his face—the soul of a hyena with the heart of a fox.

"And you thought to play with me?" Loubeque murmured wonderingly, mere to himself than to his captive. "The man who knows me better than anyone else thought to catch Loubeque sleeping. You dared come near me after the second affair?"

Thompson seemed to gain a bit of courage from the man's tone. Indeed, underlying the words, was a self reproach, a query, a bewilderment that he knew Hugo Loubeque had never felt before. His hand started to creep from the pocket of his coat but an enigmatic, little gesture of the spy's with the tiny automatic in his palm paralyzed those clever fingers.

"No, no, my dear Thompson. Don't think I am getting old. If I but had the time I should strangle you with these hands. They itch for the feel of your throat once more. Remember the job was not completed properly through no fault of my own. I have a little favor to ask you—"

The thief gulped something inaudible but Loubeque smiled his mockery of an honest ninth once more, taking the delight of a cat in playing with the mouse it has captured and frightened into partial inanition.

"You must pity me since you think I have grown feeble and old enough to continue to play such pranks with me, don't you now, Thompson?"

The man's eyes glittered venomously as he fastened them upon the toes of his boots, disdainful to answer.

"Certainly you do and that is pleasing to an old man who is breaking. Now, Thompson, just step to the telephone and call up the desk downstairs." He made a significant little gesture with the revolver and the man hurriedly took down the receiver, his face a pasty yellow.

"Say there is a hotel sneak thief in Mr. Loubeque's apartment waiting to be arrested. Mr. Loubeque has no time to make charges now, but will return shortly or meet the procession downstairs."

The receiver dropped clattering from the thief's hand. Loubeque waved the automatic quietly toward it and, as the pitiful eyes of his former servant met his own, they read no pity there, nothing save a cold vindictive intent. The trembling hand took up the receiver once more and, word by word, transmitted the message as it fell like icy particles from the spy's lips. Then, as though stung to uncontrollable rage by the needless cruelty of his punishment, Thompson whirled toward him, words falling from his lips in hot, unquenchable fury.

"Turn me over, will you! Well, listen to what's coming to you when you do it. I know a thing or two—"

"You know too much," smiled the spy coolly. "That is exactly the reason I am disposing of—"

"And I know about her," the thief's hand waved toward the corridor. "Maybe I can't tell a thing or two about you and her. What's she doing here—what's the reason she got on the Empress and stuck to you ever since—"

The revolver slapped against the opposite wall as Loubeque hurled it at the man's head, following it with his flying body, his frame crashing the man to the floor, his fingers groping for the vile mouth that spluttered on.

"I ain't saying as what you and me know—I'm saying as what I can tell and what it'll look like. What—"

Loubeque turned his head suddenly, his ears fairly peaked with the eagerness of his listening. The rattle of the elevator outside reached his ears. He sprang to his feet, dragging the butler after him.

"We must get out," he breathed hoarsely. "We must get away before they come. I'll—I'll kill you—for this—"

Swiftly the pair darted through the door and down the hall. Loubeque hurriedly twisted the knob to Lucille's door, it flung open. With a gasp

ing sob of relief he dragged Thompson after him and slapped the door shut, maintaining his hold meantime. The flurry of rushing feet was in the corridor. Breathless he waited, listening with every nerve to his body.

Once a puzzled expression crossed his face as a little feminine cry of fear and dismay reached his ears. He heard a scrambling, rushing sound, the slapping of a door, the jar of the elevator cage, its rattling descent, then silence. He turned to the traitorous servant.

"I'll phone," he responded, hardening instantly at the shadow of displeasure that crossed her face. Evidently she wished to be rid of him. He smiled to think of how close the game was to being finished. Somehow, he could not get any acute pleasure out of it now he looked at this smiling girl and realized that precious few would be the smiles upon that face after he had finished. But, pshaw! Why would his mind persist in thinking of such things. He bowed and repeated the hour of their engagement as she tripped down the hall, then resumed his seat at the table.

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Lucille Opened the Window and Slipped Inside, Her Bosom Heaving tumultuously at This Opportunity to Search the Suite of Hugo Loubeque.

stand the hurried retreat of both from the room. She opened the window and slipped inside, her bosom heaving tumultuously at this opportunity to search the man's suite.

The door slapped open just as she was exploring the drawer of the table. She felt herself seized by the wrists, uttered a cry of protest and dismay and pleading, only to look into strange, brutal faces, the faces of house detectives and not the sardonically friendly one of Loubeque.

"Nipped in the act!" grated one of them, as he dragged her toward the door. "The cabaret dame, too?"

Protesting, weeping, hysterical, Lucille was dragged to the elevator and landed into a cab. Unable to think, to reason, she only realized the full extent of her calamity when the green globe before the grim police station loomed before her eyes, as she was roughly assisted from the cab and taken before the uniformed sergeant behind the desk.

She might have been unconscious, so little was she actually aware of what was transpiring. Acute, yet merely subconsciously so, she knew she defended herself stoutly against the charge of being a little sneak-thief, showing over five thousand dollars to prove she did not need to stoop to such work. She feverishly cited the obvious ridiculousness of Hugo Loubeque's making such a charge against her. In explanation of her presence on the five escape, she had nothing to say. The sergeant was frankly puzzled.

Obviously this girl was not a thief. The brilliant idea struck him of summoning the jeweler from whom she claimed to have received the money. Also the failure to produce Loubeque argued heavily against the house detective's case.

And all the while Lucille paced up and down the floor, white-faced, miserable, her lips moving as she muttered over and over again her proud, paltry, sorry, forgetful of the horrible mess she had gotten herself in.

"Five thirty this afternoon—Ensign Howell calls for the papers. Five thirty-five thirty—I must be there—must—must—"

And the station house clock grinded wide derision at her, its hands pointing frantically toward the hour of four.

## CHAPTER XXXXI.

An Ensign Feels His Dignity Offended.

IT lacked but fifteen minutes to five before she found herself upon the street with the jeweler who had rushed to her assistance and, after a short conference with the officers and detectives had arranged her release, personally agreeing to produce her when desired. On the sidewalk he told her that only his knowledge of her parentage, her possession of the necklace and her speaking to him before of the stolen papers enabled him to believe her story.

"If you know Loubeque has the papers," he demanded as a triumphant clincher to his exordium, "why don't you call on a policeman to protect you and to rescue them?"

Lucille smiled faintly at his commonplace advice, realizing the absolute impossibility of impressing anyone with the power of her enemy. And she must hurry to the mysterious house where Ensign Howell was to call at five thirty. Even as she thanked her friend, bidding him goodbye at the door of the motor car, coughing impatiently for the passenger who had summoned it, she noticed a policeman importantly swinging his club, sole symbol of authority, and thought of the slim chance he would have against a spy who might swing rulers to work out his ends. No, the little jeweler could never be trusted to understand.

Hurriedly she searched the streets for the mysterious residence of Hugo Loubeque. Nothing mattered to her now, she did not care what happened to her. She was a cat-a-tiger cat more savage than any she had encountered in the jungle, for they had failed and she would not fail in this, her last attempt against the international spy.

She had ten minutes leeway before the Ensign was due to call, ample opportunity if she had not forgotten any details of the message. The house was vacant just as she had thought it would be, for Loubeque would never trust himself for a long time to the place that had once been raided. It would suffice for this short bit of business—that was all.

She let herself easily by the door, the smashed lock of the raiding party never having been replaced. Swiftly she rushed through the familiar rooms, the sliding doors that held so many horrible menacing thoughts for her. With lightning fingers she examined sliding panels, moving picture frames. In the desk drawer of the spy she found a medium sized automatic, the silencer still fastened on it. She shed a tear, as she moved to the basement, for the gallant captain of the liner who had lost his life through one of these weapons while endeavoring to assist her.

In the basement, as she expected, she came upon the system of levers that controlled the intricate machinery of the household. Plainly marked they all were, also the speed and velocity with which the work might be done was indicated by a simple system of buttons. Lucille tested several, finding they answered readily to her touch, when she was interrupted by the clanging of the bell.

The last act in the play was about to be begun. Ensign Howell was at the door, unless the spy had detected her trick in tampering with the message of the carrier pigeon. All the weeks, the months of peril and privation were things forgotten, things that became as nothing against the work before her now. Steadily she ascended the stairs.

Her right hand, which had been clasped the revolver concealed beneath her coat, unclasped, and a sign of obvious relief came from her lips as she opened the door to greet a young Ensign in uniform. She did not quite know what she would have done had it been Loubeque.

"Ensign Howell?" she murmured, flushing prettily at the admiration and astonishment on the officer's face at being greeted by such a vision. "I am very sorry," she murmured hurriedly, as he started to enter, "but Mr. Loubeque was obliged to leave hurriedly. He left word that he would surely be at any place convenient after eight forty-five."

"Any place convenient?" The officer's tones were more of surprise than vexation.

"That is," she hesitated, "where it would be convenient for a cutter or boat of some sort to take him to the Terror. That master is of such importance he does not care—that is—"

The young man straightened himself, his face wearing an expression of wounded dignity. Lucille heaved a sigh of relief.

"That is quite Mr. Loubeque's privilege," he snapped. "I shall write the address on a card where the cutter will be so there can be no further mistake."

Lucille accepted the card negligently, holding her eyes averted so that he might not read the ecstasy that fairly flooded them. She watched his ruler-straight back as it disappeared down the street then clasped the card feverishly to her breast. The first move had been made and she had more than taken the honors. High hope beat in her heart because of the little victory. She snapped her teeth tightly shut. Yes, the papers would be taken aboard the Terror, but not by Hugo Loubeque. Neither would there be any affidavit with them from the arch spy. She

was ready for anything now. Time and again the man had placed her life in danger, had stopped at nothing to gain possession of the packet. And now the means were in her hands to play a man's part, and an unscrupulous man's, in this warfare. She took the revolver from its hiding place and examined it carefully. Yes, the would shoot to kill if necessary, Loubeque most not win. As though to test her courage she stepped into the big living room. A portrait in oils of the owner of the house looked down from the walls at her. Steadily, reflectively, without a quiver, she lifted the automatic and fired. The canvas ripped squarely across the face and Lucille turned silently and continued her examination of the house.

Laggard time for once flew while she waited the long interval that was to elapse before the arrival of the spy. Lucille found once more the tunnel through which she had been led, found mysterious passages and explored them, studied out the position she would be in when the completed work with the enemy who was to come.

A step sounded overhead, slow, measured, methodical. She pressed close against the wall, waited the sound of mystery, the examination of the mysteries. Her fingers trembled slightly. This feet moved on the stairs. She waited, fingers outstretched toward a little ivory button. The cool surface kissed the finger pad, the pad upon which depended the honor of father and sweetheart, which spell home, life, love to her. Somewhere a clock was ticking. No, it was her heart. Pounding, pounding loud and clear, the sound would deafen her. Still, she waited. From above—silence.

## CHAPTER XXXXII.

The Hour Approaches.

HUGO LOUBEQUE moved slowly to his private office on the second floor. He lifted and slightly as he went up the stairs. Objects were in the house, ghost-memories that he was about to slay, slay and forever. And all the ghosts were those of Hate, had always been those of Hate, until this slip of a girl had come here.

He seated himself at his desk to wait, wandering off in a day dream of pleasant memories. Lucille had her very presence here had made the place unquiet. What had the witch done to him that she could enter away all the grim visions of blood and outrage and evil through which he had gone in his life pursuit of revenge? He took the precious packet of stolen papers from his pocket.

The sweet he had longed for was his now and yet it was not sweet. No, all the sweetness of his life had been since first he looked toward the heavens and the giant man-made bird brought into his life Lucille. And this sweetest was his to lose. He was to turn to gall and wormwood that he might cling to an aged memory.

He slapped his fist heavily upon the table, cursing himself for a fool that such thoughts should oppress him. Forcibly he recalled the days at West Point, the theft of his sweetheart by Sumpter Love, his own disgrace and expulsion and the hard, barren life that followed. Hate was king, had always been king and would be crowned this night—this very minute—

What ailed the Ensign that he did not come. It was past the time appointed. That was most unusual. He strode nervously up and down the floor. Nerves tightened within him. Could it be—was it possible that, after all—Palaw! Away with such child's thoughts. There was a man, had always played more than a man's work in the game of life.

Alone, Always had been alone. Servants. Yes, there were still servants but they must be held in abject fear, must sometimes be killed even as Thompson had been killed. Thompson—

The beginning of the papers had been with Thompson, and now how very close the end had been the butler's watch. The key terror on that face at which he had glanced back, seared it into his brain and he shrank away from it. He flung out his hands in a wide gesture of defiance and simultaneously the door gave way violently beneath him, flashed down with lightning speed, bringing up upon the basement floor with such violence that everything in the room was overturned, while he himself lay flat stunned against the wall.

He staggered away, flailing himself so weak and dazed he was obliged to clutch the table edge to keep from toppling over. Something cool and soft brushed against his hand, then the softness grew as iron and his fingers were loosened from their clutch. He staggered back, back against the basement wall. He heard Lucille's voice, uttered a little cry of delight. His hands encountered the little switch, the trigger, the firing. The room was a flood of yellow light in the center of which, slowly retreating toward the tunnel exit from the house, revolved pointed steadily at him with eyes shining behind the revolver that were harder even than the glare of metal stood Lucille Love, the precious packet of papers in her hand, the fingers of which clutched them in a death-dealing grip.

Slowly, without a word, she disappeared from view, departed as abruptly, as unexpectedly as she had appeared, making use of the spy's ingenuity to turn it against him in this, his greatest hour. For a moment he could not think or do anything, then he darted toward the tunnel, staggering back as a white hot iron seared his brow even as an orange spurt of flame leaped out the darkness at him.

He could not charge that way. He dashed to the stairs, rushing into the open, hatless, wild, disheveled. An automobile stood before the door. He directed it wildly toward the tunnel entrance, crying there barely in time to see Lucille step frailly to the motor car and dart forward like a living thing.

Helpless, hopeless, yet fighting on with bull dog ferocity, Loubeque continued the chase. Times he would lose her only to pick the car up again in the most unexpected place. Then, for a full five minutes, along the water front, she disappeared.

A husky, brute chauffeur stepped before his driver and slammed open the door.

"Hey, youse," he barked angrily, "whatta yuh mean chasin' a lady like dat?"

Loubeque did not answer. Instead he put a question, snapping it in a tone of authority that made even the man cringe.

"Where did she go?"

The driver passed him a grimy card. The international spy turned it over in his hand, reading the address upon it and marking that it was not a block away. On the opposite side read Ensign Howell's name. The chauffeur was pointing out upon the harbor, Loubeque looked, marked the slim figure of Lucille standing upright in the briskly-manned cutter approaching the big ship. A speck of white fluttered in her hands. It dropped. The hands themselves flung out farewell to him and, as the big ship slowly disappeared, leaving in its wake, but a whirl of rushing water, he turned away.

His shoulders seemed to have slumped in the half hour, his face to have undergone a chiseling process by the sculptor Suffering. He turned away slowly. A smile crossed his face.

"That must be her handkerchief coming in," cried the chauffeur, rushing down and rescuing the filmy bit of lace.

Loubeque took it, passing the man a bank note. When he entered the machine, he buried his face in it—still smiling.

(Continued Next Week.)